

# On Second Thought...

*Down with CFCs! But not right now, OK?*

**F**OR YEARS, environmentalists have been pressuring companies like Du Pont to stop manufacturing the ozone-destroying CFCs used in refrigerators and air conditioners. The clamor became so great, in fact, that Congress voted to ban pro-

duction of the substance after 1996. In response, Du Pont last year announced it would stop producing CFCs for use in industrial countries by the end of 1994.

Not so fast, cried the EPA in December. It seems Du Pont needs to continue

producing CFCs through 1995 in order to reduce the consumer cost of the accelerated phase-out, and to help the EPA avoid having to establish another arcane exemption program.

Du Pont has dutifully agreed to comply with the EPA's request, while no doubt pondering the mysteries of environmental politics and consumer demand. Maybe they should organize a demonstration.

—CRAIG COX

# Demonizing the Boss

*Thoughts on Whitewater, power, and being the boss*

**T**HE WHITEWATER FRENZY makes me think of nothing quite so much as the Wizard of Oz. The story of discovering the ordinary man behind the Wizard is the quintessential fairy tale for our time, this era of post-heroic leadership, when the Question Authority generation finally has come to power. With fairy tales, though, the ending is what's important. And with Whitewater, the ending's all wrong.

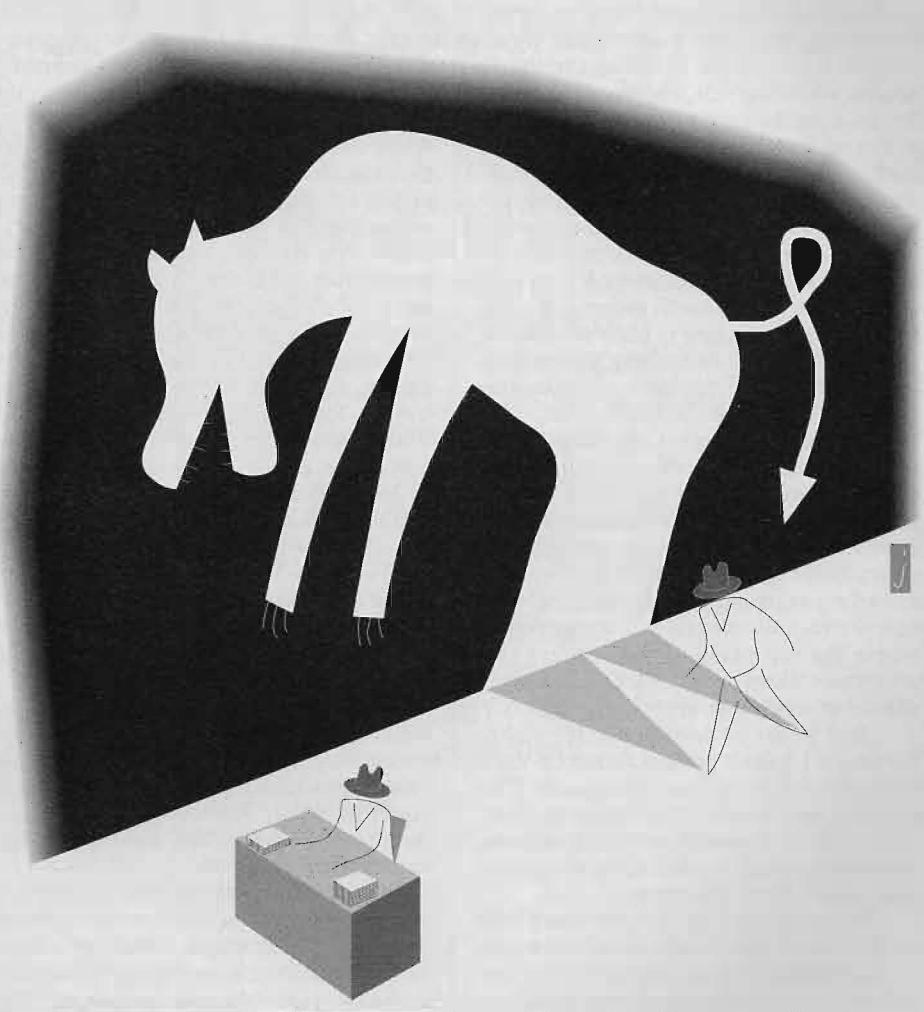
I mean, imagine watching this version of the Wizard of Oz: In the presence of the great one, Dorothy and her pals pull aside the curtain of power, and they see that the mighty Prez (oops, Wiz) is human after all. But wait. They're not happy about it. They're not even mildly unhappy. They're enraged. The little foursome (and Toto too) suddenly swells into a bloodthirsty mob, and they're pouncing on the guy behind the curtain, they're tearing him limb from limb—and now they've found his wife and they're tearing her apart too. Yikes.

So what gives? Why are we writing the story this way? Why are we so *enraged*?

You can answer that with a lengthy treatise about investments and losses and outsize gains, about phone calls that were proper or improper, influence that was or wasn't used—but I don't think that's the point.

In the broader historical picture, the point is that the pendulum of public opinion has swung from deifying our leaders to demonizing them. As Sissela Bok observes in *Lying*, this pendulum swing in our esteem for the presidency began with Dwight Eisenhower. After serving as the godlike commander of the armed forces during World War II, Ike fell from the heavens by telling the first presidential lie (at any rate, the first lie to be openly exposed). He said there were no U2 spy planes over Russia and then, whoops, a U2 crashed on Russian soil. But the interesting point that Bok makes is this: The public at that time was genuinely shocked that the president had lied to them.

Such innocence is hard to imagine today. For Ike's lie marked the beginning of a



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change in the presidency—a change that reached its climax with Watergate, when the

presidency itself became a lie, when we stopped expecting anything but lies.

**I**N THE GRIP OF THIS CYNICISM, we've developed a pervasive ambivalence about power. Power is something "they" hold—those bad guys over there—and the only noble response is to fight it. So it is with Whitewater. The pure folk outside the evil halls of power are determined to fight Bill and Hillary, to uncover their inevitable wickedness, and to denounce them from the roof-

tops. Nowadays, this is how we pretend to affect social change.

But the problem is, it's essentially an adolescent stance. It may have made sense when we were nineteen, but now that the anti-establishment generation has grown up to become the establishment, it's a model that no longer fits.

And with what do we replace it? We don't really believe in the concept of power in the hands of good people—it sounds like a lot of baloney, like some PR agency got the "power" account.

What we need to imagine is a genuinely ethical leader, who still makes blunders—sometimes even ethical blunders. Who among us hasn't done something we regret? Something that really wasn't right? We all have. But the nature of scandal militates against admitting this, because scandal relies on a rigid stance toward ethics: Either you're ethically perfect, or you're scum. If a leader is flawed, it must be a fatal flaw. There's no room for the idea of power in the hands of good people who sometimes make mistakes. How can you make ethical mistakes and still be a good person?

And so here we are: A generation coming to power that is sure to make mistakes—and scared as hell of making mistakes. A generation playing out the story of its ambivalence on the back of Bill Clinton.

Politics is the most visible arena in which this ambivalence manifests itself today. But I see a parallel process underway in business, in our evolving idea of management. As our mythology of the presidency is changing, so too is our mythology of management. We no longer glorify command-and-control management, where the top person issues orders and everyone follows along. We Question Authority at work now too.

And we go on devil hunts. It's a phenomenon I hadn't put my finger on until Whitewater, but now that I've named it, I see it everywhere. I call it demonizing the boss: that off-hand, knee-jerk, self-righteous way employees criticize their managers, their supervisors, their employers.

I've done it myself. The last time I held a job where I wasn't the boss, my co-workers and I loved to trash our publisher, complaining routinely about how incompetent he was, what a jerk he was. Many of my friends today do the same. One who works at Federal Express complains that her boss doesn't do anything, just sits in his office all day and reads reports (yes, and helps run one of the best-managed companies in the nation).

Demonizing the boss, really, is like criticizing our parents—which we did religiously in our teens. The difference is that most of us grow up to become parents, and we learn that maybe our folks weren't so jerky after all; maybe it is hard to be a parent. But most

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of us don't grow up to become managers—in fact very few of us do. So we never learn what it's like on the other side.

I'm sensitive to this business of demonizing bosses because I've made that transition, recently enough to still feel like a newcomer. And from yonder side of the desk, I can say that it doesn't feel like it seemed it would. It's not like you get to pull out the bullhorn and order people to do this, do that, while you get all the perks, all the glory. It's more like having an enormous responsibility that you can't possibly exercise alone, but whose burden you must ultimately carry alone. You're more dependent on other people than ever before. And the pressure to get it right is greater than ever before, because if you screw up it affects everyone. People are looking to you for direction, for clarity, for tools, for reinforcement, for money, for pats on the back—for all the things everybody wants from life and never gets enough of. It's like waking up one day to realize that suddenly everyone thinks you're the Wizard of Oz.

How I would love, some days, to have my own Wizard—someone I could go to, to demand a larger budget. Or less stress. Someone to blame when life isn't exactly as I want it. But I'm it. Tag, I'm it. And run as I might, I can't find anybody else to pin it on.

I wish I had known, at that last place I worked, how hard it was for my boss. I was acting like he was so big and powerful, and I was so small and insignificant, nothing I did could hurt him. He seemed to me like a statue in the square: hard, unfeeling, different from the rest of us.

It's curious, isn't it, how we put our leaders on pedestals, and then try to knock them off. It's something about our willingness to believe the worst of people in power, even as we expect the most from them. Paradoxically, it's about our eagerness to bring the powerful down to human size, and our inability to believe they really are human.

We hear stories all the time about cruelty in high places, but what I'm noticing these days is the cruelty of those below. Like when a company is wrestling with some problem and somebody knows part of the answer but doesn't speak up: "Because no one asked." Or someone sees a task that needs doing and doesn't do it: "Because it's not my job." These are small

betrayals of the common spirit. They are ways of saying, in effect, the common good is none of my business.

In similar ways, managers betray the common spirit when they hoard problems, hiding their difficulties behind a facade of "having everything under control." In these stances, employees and managers are hiding from each other, on either side of the Oz curtain. It's lonely for leaders, frustrating for employees, and harmful to our companies.

We cling to the old ways, in part, because it's comforting to believe that somewhere out there is the Wizard with all the answers. Somewhere out there is someone we can blame for how screwed up everything is. I mean, look at the list of problems we expect one person, the president, to solve: poverty, war, the deficit, health care, inflation, crime. And we want him to do it with a smile and a wave, and to keep each of us from sacrifice along the way. And if we even once catch him fibbing, we'll kill him.

So why are we so enraged? Because we're terrified. The Wizard is a human being after all, and he gets confused sometimes, and he screws things up—and here we are adrift in this world that is complicated and messy and disappointing, and no one is in charge. Or rather, we're in charge as much as anyone is. Tag, we're it.

**B**UT THEN, we're still left with the idea of leadership. After all, some people are leaders, and they have more power than other people—and what about that? We can't just dissolve into collectives, where everybody's equal; that's an experiment that absolutely didn't work. So if leaders aren't really above everybody else, like we used to think, and they aren't exactly the same as everybody else—what are they?

Leaders do have a certain kind of magic, I've come to believe. It's a very human kind of magic—not the sort that waves a wand and spares us from danger. In fact, a good leader often uses pain just as the Wizard of Oz did, sending Dorothy and friends off on a perilous journey to perform a difficult task which the Wizard himself could not do. That's one kind of magic leaders work: helping us accomplish things they themselves can't. Helping us realize how much we actually can do. Helping us profit from the inevitable pain of living.

And they do something else as well, which is to celebrate with us when we've done the deed. For even though the Wizard of Oz turned out to be a bumbling old man—every bit as lost as everyone else—he did in the end work the magic the seekers sought, giving to the tin man a heart; to the scarecrow, a brain; to the cowardly lion, courage. He did what a leader does, which is to give people what has been theirs all along: their own power.

—MARJORIE KELLY